

Post Dispatch 12/13/99

Crews dig up waste drums, contaminated dirt

EPA project at Cahokia site is halfway done

Cleanup is planned in Sauget

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Of the Post-Dispatch

Crews from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have dug up 850 waste drums and more than 6,000 tons of contaminated dirt at an industrial site near the Mississippi River in Cahokia.

The \$24 million removal effort is part of a long-awaited

cleanup of polluted sites in the Sauget and Cahokia areas — for years considered the worst contaminated sites in Illinois.

For the last six weeks, crews have been digging up parts of 40 acres on a landfill and waste-disposal site west of Illinois Route 3 near Cargill Road. Their work is about halfway done.

The area is heavily contaminated with heavy metals, including lead, as well as paints, solvents and polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs. Officials have been worried about the contamination leaching into the Mississippi.

"We are primarily looking for the hot spots," explained Kevin Turner, the EPA's on-site coordinator.

A municipal garbage dump was once located on the site, but the EPA has found that over the last 40-plus years in-

dustrial waste was dumped there as well.

In one section, workers dug up about 300 waste drums that trucks had dropped off. Labels on those drums trace them to Dow Chemical Co., Monsanto Co.'s chemical business that has since become Solutia Inc. and Mallinckrodt Inc., Turner said.

Turner said EPA officials targeted the flood plain area now because it is dry. Moreover, officials have been concerned about the number of trespassers who fish, hunt and use off-road vehicles in the area.

Cleanup crews are treating the lead contamination but will then ship the drums and the soil via rail to an Oklahoma disposal company in coming months, Turner said.

The Cargill Road site is one of two priorities for the EPA

in the Cahokia and Sauget area. The other is Dead Creek, a 4-mile-long creek on the east side of Route 3.

Since September, work crews hired by Solutia have been doing ground water, soil and other testing along Dead Creek. The creek, which in prior years has caught on fire, runs through residential areas south of Solutia and other industrial plants.

Solutia is conducting the \$3 million study under the direction of the EPA. EPA officials have said they hope they can get a cleanup started by 2001 or 2002.

Residents have complained not only of the contamination, but also of flooding into their yards and basements. Solutia has agreed to replace two downstream culverts to help alleviate the flooding problem, Turner said.